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Central Intelligence Agency



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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 February 1983

## IRAN: EXPORT OF THE REVOLUTION--A STATUS REPORT

Summary

*The Khomeini regime is committed to spreading its Islamic ideology and enhancing its role in international politics. (see Annex) It perceives this, in part, as a struggle against US and Soviet interests. From the Iranian perspective, no clear distinction exists between its "export of the revolution"--or tabligat in Iranian parlance--and so-called normal diplomatic activities.* [redacted]

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*Close to home, Iran faces a major hurdle in exporting its Islamic revolution due to the antipathy between Shia and Sunni Moslems and between Persians and Arabs. Gulf states' Sunni Arab majorities may prove to be a natural barrier to the spread of the revolution. Still, the Iranians probably are convinced they can overcome these sectarian differences and exploit the same popular return to Islam and grievances against corruption and the spread of Western, secular influences in the Gulf that led to the downfall of the Shah.* [redacted]

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*This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Office of Near East/South Asia Analysis. Comments are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, [redacted]*

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Copy 40 of 44

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Iranian leaders--both clerics and laymen--assert publicly and privately that Iran's revolutionary experience provides valuable lessons not only to Moslem communities, but to all peoples "oppressed by Eastern or Western imperialism". They consider worldwide propagation of their revolutionary Islamic tenets and experiences a politico-religious obligation. [ ]

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Tehran's international activities were unfocused and badly organized until early 1982 when a degree of domestic stability and higher oil revenues allowed the regime to devote more resources to exporting its revolutionary ideals. The ill-fated coup attempt in Bahrain seemed to emphasize to the regime the need for greater central control over the types of activities and methods it employed. Reporting from a variety of sources shows that the ruling clerics still disagree on how aggressively tabligat should be pursued, but not whether. [ ]

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Our review of Iranian activities in 1982 shows that Tehran is not limiting its efforts to export the ideals of its revolution to any particular country or region. (see Annex) The Khomeini regime, however, wants to play a leading role in international forums as a leader of the Third World and has aimed many of its activities at those countries. Public remarks of Iranian leaders suggest they believe that their international activities will enhance their hold on power in Iran by creating a supportive global network of ideological sympathies and shared economic and political interests and experiences. [ ]

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Tehran's export of the revolution presents a twofold challenge to US interests. First, Iranian leaders are exploiting the appeal of their successes against the Shah, the West, and Iraq to attract dissident groups and individuals of widely differing ideologies. Iran provides training and support on a significant scale for many of them. The activities of such groups are likely to be directed against pro-Western governments and individuals. Some may be aimed at US installations and personnel. [ ]

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Second, the Khomeini regime presents a broader challenge through its increasingly sophisticated political maneuvering with Third World governments designed to reduce US influence. Iran uses its oil as a bargaining tool to gain political support or at least neutrality from other countries. Iran's ability to assume a leading role in international forums on behalf of the Third World and against the US has been limited, but would be strengthened by extended Iranian domestic stability and Tehran's ability to dictate the terms of a settlement in its war with Iraq. [ ]

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### Background

During the period between the fall of the Shah and early 1982, the Khomeini regime's efforts to expand its ties abroad were largely unfocused and ineffective, according to [ ]

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[redacted] overt information. To a large extent this resulted from wide variations in the views of Iranian leaders over how aggressively to pursue export of the revolution, or tabligat. In addition, the chaos of the post-revolutionary period allowed individuals and groups who had relationships with foreign dissidents or Moslem communities to propagandize or provide aid and paramilitary training with little or no central control, according to reliable sources. The aborted coup plot in Bahrain staged in December 1981 was arranged through such standing contacts. [redacted]

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During this early period, when those supporting aggressive tabligat clashed with those wedded to using diplomatic practice, we believe the views of the more radical individual or project usually prevailed. The most important brakes on the radicals then were domestic problems, declining financial resources, inexperience in running a government and operating in the diplomatic arena, and difficulties in organizing activities abroad and training programs at home. [redacted]

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### Gaining Greater Control

By early 1982, the regime began to centralize, systematize, and broaden its revolutionary program. It was aided in this by the virtual elimination of the clerics' leftist and Westernized lay rivals, growing cohesion of Iran's new "Islamic" system, and burgeoning oil revenues. The appointment last November of the new Islamic Guidance Minister, Hojjat ol-Eslam Khatemi, was part of this consolidation process.<sup>1</sup> In his first public statement after taking office, Khatemi called for "a strategy for informing the world's people about the Islamic revolution in keeping with good taste and propriety." He added that every would-be Iranian spokesman must have "security clearance" from his Ministry for such activity. [redacted]

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Two weeks later the Prime Minister ordered the Foreign Ministry to advise all missions abroad that no one without specific authorization from Tehran was to be allowed to present themselves to the local government or press as an Iranian spokesman. The Iranian press noted that his order was in response to "numerous cases" in which such activities had "caused great harm" to Iranian interests. [redacted]

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<sup>1</sup> The Islamic Guidance Ministry replaced the National Guidance Ministry in August 1981. Its mandate is to oversee the application of Islamic principles to Iranian affairs at home and abroad. Khatemi's predecessor--also a cleric--resigned in August 1982, probably because of factional infighting. [redacted]

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[redacted]

In December, the Iranian press reported an appeal to Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's heir apparent, by the head of the Revolutionary Guard's Liberation Movements Department for authorization to continue tabligat programs the Guard had begun. Montazeri's subsequent, widely-publicized decree backed him--the two are brothers-in-law--but also insisted that all such Guard activities be coordinated with the Foreign Ministry. The decree also indicated that an independent cleric-led panel might have to be named to guide tabligat activities because of the "bureaucratic problems"--read factional disputes--within governmental organs. [redacted]

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At about the same time the Iranian press also carried a statement by President Khamenei calling for "clarification of Iran's position toward all states". Ayatollah Montazeri told reporters, however, that the Majles is unlikely soon to be able to provide such clarification--presumably reinforcing his own call for an interim clerical panel to provide guidance on foreign associations.<sup>2</sup>

[redacted]

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### Disagreements Among Iranian Leaders

Still, significant disagreement seems to exist among Iran's leading clerics over how aggressively to export their revolutionary ideals, [redacted]

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[redacted] Iranian leaders publicly advocate activities ranging from propaganda to paramilitary training for dissident groups. Leadership factions centering on this issue are not stable and often fluctuate and compromise to avoid open and harmful disputes. [redacted]

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<sup>2</sup> We note the regime's lack of success in its efforts to legislate resolutions to other issues controversial among the ruling clerics--land reform, foreign trade nationalization, labor relations. The regime has instead resorted to ad hoc regulations and panels while prolonged negotiations among rival factions continue. [redacted]

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The most conservative interpretation of tablighat is advocated by lesser clerical and lay figures who support only international diplomatic activities compatible with traditional Moslem practices, such as expanded contacts with clerics and Moslem communities abroad. [REDACTED]

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Most prominent Iranian officials, such as President Khamenei, Majles Speaker Rafsanjani, Prime Minister Musavi, and Foreign Minister Velayati, seem to take a pragmatic approach that puts them between the more radical and more conservative advocates. Overt information [REDACTED] indicate they generally believe that tablighat should be employed to help reestablish Iran's international diplomatic and economic relationships, to cultivate support within the Nonaligned Movement and other Third World groups, and to improve domestic economic and social conditions. Nonetheless, the exigencies of the domestic power struggle, will often lead them to support more aggressive policies abroad. [REDACTED]

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Propaganda support to regional Moslem groups seeking to establish Islamic governments or active against Israel seems to be the least controversial among Iranian leaders. Most leaders

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[redacted]

also are willing to aid some non-Moslem "liberation movements" and Third World governments perceived to be anti-US and--more recently--anti-Soviet. Diplomatic and economic contacts with "anti-imperialist" regimes are now expanding rapidly. It has recently broadened its diplomatic relations with China, Nicaragua, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe and expanded its economic ties with Brazil, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka. [redacted]

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### Methods

The Iranian clerics' tactics for exporting the revolution are based primarily on those used successfully against the Shah and range from normal diplomatic activity to coercion, such as the public and private pressures Tehran is putting on Gulf states to reduce their support for Iraq.

Iran also is likely to remain interested in active measures and may employ them against Gulf governments in an effort to establish regimes more amenable to it and more sympathetic to local Shia populations. The most notorious effort in that direction was the ill-fated coup attempt in Bahrain in late 1981. It was executed by supporters of aggressive export of the revolution--apparently without official sanction by the Khomeini regime.

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[redacted]

When the plot was exposed, Tehran publicly supported the Bahraini dissidents, but denied any Iranian involvement.

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[redacted]

Although its objectives remain unchanged, Iran's recent methods seem to focus on seminars, propaganda, and less aggressive and flamboyant cultivation of local dissidents in the Gulf states. The Khomeini regime exploits established religious networks and focuses on students, teachers, and the urban poor.

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[redacted]

[redacted] Tehran also uses cassette recordings extensively in its proselytizing. It is expanding Iranian radio and television broadcast facilities used to beam propaganda abroad. [redacted]

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Iranian diplomats use their missions as propaganda and recruitment centers, according to State Department reporting [redacted] Cleric-led delegations have fanned out around the world to open contacts and explain the new Islamic Republic. The Khomeini regime stages widely-publicized, expense-paid conferences and seminars in Iran and abroad designed to foster contacts and to spread its revolutionary experiences and principles.<sup>4</sup> [redacted]

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Tehran staged several well-publicized conventions in 1982. In June, a "world conference of liberation movements" was staged in Tehran. In the fall, Iran sponsored conferences in several Third World capitals to indoctrinate with anti-Saudi and anti-US propaganda participants in the yearly Moslem pilgrimage (Haj) to holy sites in Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup> In December, Moslem clerics from 40 nations convened in Tehran to "lay the groundwork for Islamic governments throughout the world", according to Iranian press accounts. At the same time, the Iranians staged Moslem "unity" conferences in India, Kenya and Sri Lanka. [redacted]

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<sup>4</sup> Many of these activities are sponsored by the Islamic Students' Society, which was active during the anti-Shah movement inside Iran and abroad. The Society seems to be controlled by "students following the Imam's line", such as those who took over the US Embassy in Tehran. Its members play a leading role in some Iranian Embassies and Consulates abroad. [redacted]

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Arab Moslem regimes remain suspicious of Iranian intentions, in part, because of the Iranian clerics' desire to break the Sunni Moslem hold on power in many of these countries and establish a greater role for local Shia populations. Much of the Iranian effort among Moslems is designed to reduce the influence of Saudi Arabia, whose leaders the Khomeini regime sees as corrupt Western lackeys. [REDACTED]

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#### Challenges to US Interests

The challenge of Iran's tabligat program to US interests is twofold. First, a threat to pro-Western governments and, possibly, US installations and representatives through support for selected dissident groups and some terrorist activity. Second, the reduction of Western, especially US influence worldwide through creation of coordinated initiatives by Third World states inside or outside of established international forums. [REDACTED]

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Iran's continued substantial oil revenues, championing of Islamic causes, and success in the war with Iraq give it the image of a winner and allow it to attract, train, and support like-minded dissidents. As Iranian officials charged with responsibilities for aggressive tabligat further develop expertise and international contacts, they will be able to use their assets more effectively to advance Iranian interests. The conservative states of the Persian Gulf are a high priority target. The goals are first to secure neutralism in Iran's war with Iraq, then to alter policies, through intimidation if necessary, and finally to encourage installation of Islamic governments in the Iranian mold. [REDACTED]

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Meanwhile, the Khomeini regime's diplomatic maneuvering among Third World regimes is persistent and increasingly sophisticated. It has so far attracted little following besides a few of the more radical Arab states. Iranian spokesmen, especially President Khamenei, however, continue to propose programs designed to appeal to Third World governments, reduce the influence of Western governments, and assert Iranian leadership in international forums. These include such things as a multinational fund to underwrite the expenses of international organizations from which the US withholds contributions, and the encouragement of Moslem dissident groups to use the phenomenon of revitalized Islam to weaken Western influences.

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